The House re-assembled at two of the clock, MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN in the Chair.

MESSAGE FROM LOK SABHA

The National Tax Tribunal (Amendment) Bill, 2007

SECRETARY-GENERAL: Sir, I have to report to the House the following message received from the Lok Sabha, signed by the Secretary-General of the Lok Sabha:

"In accordance with the provisions of rule 96 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha, I am directed to enclose the National Tax Tribunal (Amendment) Bill, 2007, as passed by Lok Sabha at its sitting held on the 19th March, 2007."

Sir, I lay a copy of the Bill on the Table.

श्रीमती सुषमा स्वराज (मध्य प्रदेश): उपसभापति जी...(**व्यवधान**)... हमारा एक डेलिगेशन ...(**व्यवधान**)... उपसभापति जी, हम आपसे निवेदन करना चाहते है ...(**व्यवधान**)... हमें यह बात सदन में रखने की इज़ाजत दीजिए...(**व्यवधान**)...

श्री सुरेश भारद्वाज(हिमाचल प्रदेश): उपसभापति जी ...(**व्यवधान**)...

श्रीमती सुषमा स्वराज: कार्रवाई नहीं चल सकती ...(**व्यवधान**)... हमें एक बार सदन में बोलने की इज़ाजत दीजिए ...(**व्यवधान**)...

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Now, Shri Chidambaram. Except Shri P. Chidambaram's speech, nothing will go on record.

श्री दिनेश त्रिवेदी:*

श्री सुरेश भारद्वाज:*

श्री एस0एस0 अहलुवालिया :*

THE BUDGET (GENERAL), 2007-2008—Contd.

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE (SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM): Mr. Deputy Chairman, Sir, all sections of the House should have been allowed to take part in the debate on the Bill, The Members are denied an opportunity to take part in this Bill and I strongly condemn the attitude of the BJP. They

*Not recorded.

have held the Parliament to ransom. They cannot deny the Telugu Desam Party, the CPI(M), the CPI, the Forward Bloc, the RSP, the Congress party, the NCP and all other patrties from taking part. I strongly condemn it. Nevertheless, I want to read my reply to the debate which was started by Shri Yashwant Sinha. *{Interruptions).*

I am grateful to hon. Shri Yashwant Sinha who opened the debate on the General Budget. He did so in 2004-05 and in 2006-07 too. In 2004-05, as is his wont, he found everything wrong with the first Budget of the UPA Government. Not one word of praise or acknowledgement of any initiative taken by the Government escaped his lips. *(Interruptions)* That year recorded a growth rate of 7.5 per cent. In 2006-07, he said that he had a sense of pity for the Finance Minister and the Government. Again, true to his style, not one word acknowledging the impressive growth in 2005-06 was uttered during the course of his marathon intervention. 2005-06 recorded a growth of 9 per cent and 2006-07 is expected to record a growth rate of 9.2 per cent. In a way, therefore, the harsh criticism of the Budget by the BJP, especially by Shri Yashwant Sinha, is welcome. Such criticism appears to bode well for the economy. The more vehement the criticism, the better the growth story turns out to be. May I, therefore, wish Shri Yashwant Sinha, many happy returns? In the interest of robust and sustained economic growth of the country, may I wish him a long life, many more years in the opposition and many more speeches opposing the Budget? *[Interruptions)*

The Budget may not have satisfied everyone, but there are surely aspects of the Budget which have been universally acclaimed. Why have these escaped the attention of Shri Sinha? I think, only an extremely churlish Opposition can find no merit at all in the Budget. *(Interruptions)*

Let me deal with the issue that is uppermost in the minds of most hon. Members and that is inflation. If you agree with the views shared by most economists, inflation is a monetary phenomenon. Look at the monetary aggregates: money supply is growing at 21 per cent. Non-food credit has increased, year on year, by 30 per cent. There are large inflows of foreign exchange For exampie, in 2005-06, the remittances alone from Indians working overseas have been estimated at over USS 24 billion. So far, this year, we have added US$ 42 billion, including valuation change, to the reserves. Besides, the high growth of the economy is fuelling demand,

and supply of many items has not been able to keep pace with demand *(Interruptions)*

The current inflation is driven largely by the primary articles group. In the last few weeks, the contributors to Inggation have been: maize, vegetable oils, fish, groundnut, atta, rice bran oil, cement and some items of steel, electrical machinery and wires and cables. We had a similar situation of inflationary pressures in 1990-91,1998-99 and in 2002-03 As the supply of primary articles improved, inflation moderated subsequently I wish to draw the attention of the hon. Members to the supply side of some essential primary articles For example, except in 1999-2000, wheat production has stagnated between 66 million and 72 million tonnes during the lest 10 years, *(interruptions)*

Rice production has remaned between 81 million and 90 million tonnes during most of the ten years period. The production of pulses has not exceeded 14.9 million tonnes. Demand for each of these items is rising every year. The only long-term answer is to increase production and productivity. *..(Interruptions)...*

Since inflation is a monetary phenomenon, RBI has *the* direct responsibility for maintaining price stability. When I met with t*he* Central Board of the RBI recently, I pointed out that Government had been fully supportive of the RBI in the measures that had taken and urged the RBS to continue to be Vigilant and take such measures as are necessary & maintain price stability. The RBI has already taken a number of steps to moderate money supply. 5t has used instruments such as the repo rate, the MSS arsdCRR These monetary steps will temper core inflation over a period of time. *...(interruptions)....*

However, I may also note that monetary steps do not have the same impact on fuel and food items. For example, when crude oil prices nit US$ 75 a barrel, the only way we could provide a cushion to the people was to absorb a large part of the price rise on \the Budget and on the balance sheets of the oil companies. Subsequently, there was a supply-demand mismatch in sugar. This was followed by supply constraints in wheat and puises The long-term answer is to produce more in order to meet the rising *demand* In the short term, we can only reduce customs duties as well as import these items to the extent they are available in the world market And that is what we did. Customs dudes were cut sharply

We imported 55 lakh tonnes of wheat to augment supplies in the domestic market We have allowed import of pulses, edible oils, etc. at nil or low duties. We also curtailed exports of some essential commodities, It is because of these steps that inflation has been contained at the current level. The average inflation for 2006-07 is expected to be about 5 4 per cent *...(Interruptons),,.*

Let me recall another period of high inflation in recent times. It was 2000-01. For 48 out of 52 week in that year inflation was over 6 per cent, in 22 of those weeks, inflation was over 7 per cent and in 12 of those weeks, it was over 8 per cent The principal contributor to inflation in that year was fuel and power WPI inflation touched a high of 8.8 per cent in the week ending January 13,2001 and average inflation for 2000-01 was 7.2 percent Inflation was moderated by the Government over the next six to twelve months. *.(Interruptions)..,*

On February 28,2001, Shri Yashwant Sinha rose to present the Budget for 2001-02. The year 2000-01 was drawing to a close and inflation was still above 7:5 per cent What did the Finance Minister have to say about inflation? How many words in his speech were devoted to inflation? Hon. Members may be surprised to know that the only sentence on inflation in that speech occurs in paragraph Sand it consists of 11 words, and these words were "Inflation, excluding energy, was around 4 per cent during the year." Not a word about WPI. Not a word of explanation why inflation should be measured excluding energy suppose I report inflation excluding primary articles, would that be acceptable to this House? In fact, the most callous treatment of the worst period of inflation was in the Budget Speech delivered *on* February 28,2001 ..... *(Interruption)..*

Mr. Yashwant Sinha, apparently, sees no connection between moderating inflation and impacting growth, ft seems to me that he is inviting Government to take the wrong course that will effectively kill growth. After 2000-01, the year of high inflation, the fiscal and monetary steps taken by the NDA Government effectively pushed down growth to an average of 4.66 percent in three years. We *do* not intend to commit the mistake. In fact the record of Mr. Yashwant Sinha in terms of GDP growth rate, fiscal deficit and revenue deficit is the worst in recent years. In the five years that he was Finance Minister of the NDA Government the average GDP growth rate was 5.32 per cent He inherited a fiscal deficit of 4.8 per cent and when he left office, the fiscal deficit had increased to 5 9 per cent in 2002-03. He

inherited a revenue deficit of 3.1 per cent and in 2002-03, it had risen to 4.4 per cent. So much for his record — and the NDA Government's record during those five years — in promoting growth or reining in the fiscal deficit or the revenue deficit. *...(Interruptions)....*

The difference between 2000-01 and 2006-07 is that, in 2000-01, we had high inflation but modest growth. In that year, GDP grew by only 4.4 per cent. In 2006-07, GDP is growing at over 9 per cent. As the Prime Minister said a few days ago, "our effort is to moderate inflation without affecting growth." Let me assure the hon. Members that Government has taken, and will take, fiscal, monetary and supply side measures to moderate inflation. I recognise the burden on the people, but this burden will ease over the next weeks and months ..... *(Interruptions)...*

Mr. Yashwant Sinha bitterly complained that *...(Interruptions).*

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: No, no. Mr. Ahluwaiia go back to your seat. - *....(Interruptions)...* The House is adjourned for ten minutes.

The House then adjourned

at ten minutes past two of the clock.

The House re-assembled at

twenty minutes past two of the clock,

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN in the Chair.

THE BUDGET (GENERAL), 2007-O8-Contd.

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE (SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM): Sir, the Congress Party became the single largest party in the elections *(Interruptions)...*

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Nothing will go on record *...(Interruptions)...* Nothing will go on record *...(Interruptions)...*

SHRI DINESH TRIVEDI:*

SHRI S.S. AHLUWALIA:*

SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM. Onecrore rural households *...(Interruptions)...*

SHRIMATI SUSHMA SWARAJ: Sir,*

Not recorded.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: You lay your remaining part of your speech on the Table of the House...*(Interruptions)...*

SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM: Sir, I lay the remaining part of my speech on the Table of the House *...(Interruptions)..:*

"Mr. Yashwant Sinha bitterly complained that in paragraph 8 of my speech I had said when the UPA government assumed office in 2004, the inflation graph was on the rise; but we succeeded in moderating inflation and we are confident that we can moderate the present inflationary trend too. He said that this was reflective of my mindset and even accused me of arrogance. That one short sentence in paragraph 8 is factually correct. There was no attempt to blame anyone. I would have let Shri Sinha's comment to pass, but for the further statement he made that he had never resorted to such criticism of the past period or past Finance Ministers. Memories are notoriously short. Let me recall a passage from Shri Sinha's speech on March 4,1991:

'The new Government, which assumed office in mid-November 1990, inherited an economic situation of crisis proportions. The budget deficit of the Central Government reached a level of Rs. 13,000 crores, on 30th November, 1990, as a consequence of revenue shortfalls and expenditure overruns. The Wholesale Price Index registered an increase of 8.5 per cent, while the Consumer Price Index rose by 11.9 per cent, during the first eight months of the current financial year. The sharp deterioration in the balance of payments situation led to a rapid depletion of foreign exchange reserves, which dropped to Rs. 3142 crores at the end of November, 1990 and this sum was not even sufficient to finance imports for one month.

These developments were not an unfortunate coincidence, but were the outcome of shortcomings in the macro-management of the economy in the past".

Who is Shri Yashwant Sinha criticising? Not only his immediate predecessor, Shri Madhu Dandavate, with whom he shared a cordial political association, but also the Finance Ministers of the Congress Government between 1985 and 1989.

Let me recall another passage from the speech of Shri Yashwant Sinha delivered on March 25,1998:

"Laid on the Table.

"As regards the economic situation, we are concerned to note that overall economic growth has slowed to *5%* in 1997-98, agriculture has registered negative growth of 2%, industry continues to be in the doldrums averaging only 4.6% growth over the 12 months up to January, 1998. and exports have recorded negative growth in dollar terms in esch of the three most recent months up to January. 1998, for which data are available. The bottiertecks in key infrastructure sectors are well known, the capital market has been lacklustre and the fiscal situation is significantly worse than expected."

Let me recall another passage from the speech of June 01,1998:

"In my interim budget speech I had already drawn attention to some disquieting trends: overall economic growth slowed to 5 per cent in 1997-98, agricultural growth was negative, with foodgrain production dropping to 194 million tonnes from 199 million tonnes in the previous year growth of industrial production slackened to 4 2 per cent export performance was weak for a second successive year, recording growth in dollar terms of less than 3 per cent, the fiscal deficit worsened to 61 per cent of GDP; the capital market remained in the doldrums and irrfrastructure bottlenecks continued to plague the economy."

Having set such standards of sobriety and restraint, Shri Yashwant Sinha advised me to follow his example. I am glad I have not followed his
exampie

The Congress Party became the single largest party at the last elections on the plank of the aam admi. We take this commitment to the aam admi seriously. My friends in the opposition will be disappointed if they think that they can get away with ridiculing the aam admi or the programmes designed for the aam admi . Let me ask my friends *in* the opposition a few questions. Do you or do you not support the scheme to provide jobs for 100.000 physically challenged? Do you or do you not support the promise of 100,000 scholarships through a means-cum-merit national test? Do you or do you not support the Aam Admi Bima Yojana which intends to cover one crore rural landless households? Do you or do you not support the proposal to restore our waterbodies and the first agreement signed with the World Bank for implementing this project in Tamil Nadu for a command area of 400.000 hectares? Do you or do you not support the proposal to recharge ground water in the 100 districts in seven states

which have been identified as critical? If you do not support any of these proposals, you should have the courage to stand up and denounce them. But I ask you respectfully — why do you keep silent? What does you silence mean? Are you surprised, are you cynical, or are you envious? Each one of these schemes has been possible because of growth, and because of the revenue that growth has brought to the exchequer. Each one of these schemes has been possible because we the UPA Government are confident that we can initiate them, implement them and deliver results. I ask Shri Sinha, "Are you so economical with truth that you do not wish to acknowledge that these schemes are indeed for the benefit of the aam admi?"

I could list a number of other features in the Budget which are clearly targeted to bring benefit to the aam admi. In fact, I can hand over a four page document listing these features, if the Hon'ble Shri Sinha would do me the favour of reading the document. At the top of the list is agriculture. There are other items like expansion of scholarships for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, OBCs and the minorities. There is relief to senior citizens. There is a programme for skill development. There is tax relief to the small scale industry, the small firm, the small company and the small service provider. Usually, the aam admi is a small person. By ridiculing or ignoring the various programmes announced for the small person, the opposition is actually ridiculing the aam admi.

Agriculture is at the top of the list because it is one sector which is lagging far behind the other two sectors, namely industry and services, in terms of growth. In the 27 quarters between the first quarter of 2000-01 and the third quarter of 2006-07, year-on-year average quarterly growth has been only 2.3 per cent in agriculture, compared to 7.3 per cent and 8.4 per cent in industry and services, respectively.

The NDA Government was in office for 6 years. Shri Sinha was the Finance Minister for 5 years. Is not 5 or 6 years a long enough period to make a decisive intervention in agriculture? Throughout the period 1998-99 to 2003-04, the area under cultivation for wheat remained stagnant at about 26-27 million hectares. The area under cultivation for rice remained stagnant at about 42-45 million hectares. Production and productivity were also stagnant. No one can say that there was a major breakthrough during this six year period. Who is to answer for the stagnation that we witnessed in the six year period of the NDA Government?

For the first time in recent years, the Budget focuses sharply on agriculture. We have addressed the five critical issues that affect agriculture: credit, water, seeds, fertiliser and power. On farm credit, we have kept our promise of doubling farm credit; in fact, we have done it in two years against-the promise of doing it in three. On water, there are more programmes in this Budget than in any previous Budget. We have made a begging in restoring water bodies; we have a new programme for ground water recharge; and we have a new scheme for training farmers in water management. We have also increased substantially the outlay for the Accelerated irrigation Benefit Programme (AIBP). As stated in the Budget speech, 35 projects will be completed in 2006-07 and additional irrigation potential of 900,000 hectares will be created. We hope to keep up the momentum in future years too. On seeds, we have identified the critical deficiency. Supplementing the existing programmes for production of certified seeds, we intend to launch a mission for doubling the production of certified seeds for different kinds of pulses in three years. On fertiliser, we have been generous in providing money for subsidizing fertilisers, and we have also promised that we intend to find ways and means to deliver fertiliser subsidy directly to the farmers. On power, the performance in the 8th, 9th and 10th Plans has been consistently below expectations. In the 9th Plan period, that is 1997-2002, against a planned capacity addition of 40,200 MW, the country added only 19,000 MW. I need not remind Hon'ble Member of who was in Government during the period. In the 10th Plan period, that is 2002—2007, against a planned capacity addition of 41,110 MW, the country was able to add only an estimated 23,163 MW. Both the NDA and the UPA Governments share responsibility for the poor performance. Acutely aware that we are falling behind in the race to balance supply and demand of electricity, the UPA Government has conceived, and is implementing, the Ultra Mega Power Projects Scheme (UMPP). Two UMPPs with a capacity of 4,000 MW each have been awarded and two more will be awarded by July 2007. Apart from this, we are expanding the Accelerated Power Development and Reforms Project (APDRP). We are also increasing the pace of implementation under the Rajiv Gandhi Grameen Vidhyutikaran Yojana.

Honourable Members! Each one of these interventions is intended to promote agriculture and agricultural growth. I have repeatedly pointed out that 115 million families are classified as farming families; 55 per cent of

the work force is dependent on agriculture; and that nearly three-fifth of the population shares less than one-fifth of the GDP. The promotion of agricultural growth is therefore the key to inclusive growth. It is the best weapon to fight agrarian distress, rural poverty and rural unemptoyment on a durable basis. I believe that the initiatives that we have taken in this Budget will go a long way to revive agriculture and raise the growth rate in that sector to the desired level of 4 per cent.

A lot was said about interest rate on farm loans. Until the end of 2002-03, in the five years of NDA Government and under the stewardship of Shri Yashwant Sinha, no attempt was made to reduce the interest rate on farm loans. As I am able to recall, it was only in 2003-04, that the first attempt was made to moderate interest rates on farm loans. A band of plus or minus 2 per cent over the PLR was fixed. In that year, the PLR of five major banks was between 10.25 and 11 per cent. Hence, at best, the interest rate on farm loans could have been 8.25 per cent, but it is a matter of common knowledge that no one got a farm loan at 8.25 per cent.

In July 2003, public sector banks announced that crop loans will be given at 9 per cent; When the NDA Government laid down office the declared rate of interest on farm loans was 9 per cent. While many farmers did get loans at 9 per cent, many farmers also did not get loans at 9 per cent. It was the UPA Government which decisively intervened, and braving criticism, ueclared that farm loans will be given at 7 per cent.

The amount of farm loans given in 2003-04 was Rs. 86,981 core. Today, farm loans are available at 7 per cent from public sector banks RRBs and co-operative banks. The Central Government gives a 2 per cent subvention. Many State Governments have added their own subvention and brought down the interest rate to 6 per cent or 5 per cent. What is important to note is that, at the lower rate, the total amount of farm credit in 2005-06 is expected to reach Rs. 190,000 crore and for 2007-08, we have indicated a target of Rs. 225.000 crore. We have kept our promise to double farm credit in three years; in fact we have done it in two years. More and more farmers are being brought into the fold of institutional credit. Every year, on average, about 60 lakh farmers are added to the clientele of banks. The revised draft National Policy for Farmers prepared by the National Commission on Farmers states at paragraph 1.5.6 on 'Credit' that

"The interest rate should be as low as possible. It should be possible to bring about a reduction in transaction cost by eliminating all forms of

waste and inefficiency in the operation of the banking system. The inefficiencies of the delivery system should not be loaded on the interest charged".

We shall keep in mind this recomendation while finalising the National Policy on Farmers.

Members will recall that NREGS was formally launched on February 2, 2006. Hence, the first full year for the programme is 2006-07, and that year is not yet over. It would be too early to judge the efficacy of the scheme or to pronounce on the quality of the expenditure or the management of the scheme by State Governments. Besides, the figures available State-wise cannot be compared with each other. The 200 districts are not evenly distributed among the States. Consequently, the amounts allocated to the States are not equal. States which have a larger number of districts covered under NREGS would have been allocated more money. In our preliminary assessment, some States are doing well and some are not. I think we should give more time to the States before we reach any definitive conclusion. Meanwhile, I understand that the Planning Commission and the Ministry of Rural Development are monitoring the progress of NREGS in the States.

There was some complaint about the allocation to NREGS. For 2006-07, we allocated Rs. 11,300 crore. The Revised Estimate also shows that Rs. 11,300 crore will be spent. However, there are indications that the whole of the money may not be spent. Hence, for 2007-08, we have made an initial allocation and I repeat, initial allocation of Rs. 12,000 crore and, since it is a demand driven scheme carrying a legal guarantee, we will supplement the amount according to the demand and the need. We must also keep in mind that the NREGS is a fall back scheme. If other employment opportunities, especially in agriculture, are available, a person is not likely to take up work under NREGS; and even if a person takes up work under NREGS, he or she may not avail of the maximum number of 100 days. The real test is whether a person entitled to work under NREGS has been given work on demand or has been denied work. The scheme is being implemented by State Governments. It is primarily the State Governments which have to ensure that no person entitled to work under NREGS is denied work and the wages that go with the work. I would urge Honourable Members to monitor the implementation of the Scheme in

their respective districts or constituencies and convey their assessment to the Ministry of Rural Development.

References were made to Aam Admi Bima Yojana. I would respectfully submit that this is the first large attempt by any Government to provide social security to a section of the unorganised workers in the country. The Arjun Sengupta Committee report has made some estimates of the number of people employed in the organised and unorganised sectors. For the unorganised sector, the number has been put at about 34 crore. Obviously, this includes agricultural workers and non-agricultural workers. It includes land-owning workers and landless workers. It includes self-employed such as artisans. I have with me the NSS report No. 491 of the year 2003. This report estimates the number of landless households at 1.5 crore. I readily agree that the number could be more, and I said so in the Budget speech. But we have to make a beginning. LIC has informed me that, by end March, 2007, 70 lakh households wilt be covered through the existing schemes of LIC. As Members are aware, the existing schemes are partly supported by State Governments and partly by the social security fund with the LIC. The premium liability is shared between the State Government and the social security fund. In some cases, the premium on behalf of the beneficiaries is paid under one or other scheme of different Ministries of the Central Government. Having regard to these factors, we decided to make a beginning and have proposed to cover about one crore households in 2007-08 LIC is working out the details of the scheme. It will offer cover for death and disability. I am confident of persuading State Governments to come on board and jointly fund the scheme. As we gain experience, we will extend the cover to more categories of workers in the unorganised sector.

In respect of tax related issues, the appropriate occasion to reply to them will be in the debate on the Finance Bill. Hence, Mr. Chairman, Sir, with your permission, I shall not deal with any tax related issues. But I do wish to make brief references to two matters. One is the export duty on iron ore. Honourable Members would have noticed that there are two view points. While the steel industry has supported the export duty, the iron ore exporters have pleaded for a reconsideration of duty on iron ore fines. We had already gathered a lot of material and we have asked the stakeholders to give us more material if they wish to- do so. We shall consider all the facts and circumstances objectively and take suitable

decisions. The other matter is the dual excise duty on cement and rise in the price of cement. Excise duties on most goods are *ad valorem,* where the duty in rupees rises with the price of the commodity. Excise duty on cement, on the other hand, at the request of the industry has for many years been kept at specific rates. Furthermore, dual rate is not a new phenomenon. There have been instances of dual sales tax rates; and there are instances of dual excise duty rates. Cement prices were around Rs. 136-Rs. 180 per bag in February, 2006. Even as late as October-November, 2006, prices were around Rs. 178-Rs. 218 per bag. Just before the Budget, prices had risen to around Rs. 224 per bag in some centres. Government cannot plead helplessness or remain passive when the price of a commodity such as cement rises abnormally and at a very fast rate. Government is still hopeful that cement manufacturers will realise their responsibility and moderate prices. If they face difficulties in adding capacity or accessing coal or raw-materials, certainly Government will help them in that regard. Government has once again invited the cement manufacturers to meet with Government later this week so that we can have their proposals, if any, and their suggestions. Let me, however, say that we are keeping a careful watch over the situation and we shall take appropriate steps to convince the cement manufacturers to act in the interests of the economy and the consumers.

Let me now refer to some issues which are of general concern. *Futures trading in commodities* commenced on the MCX in November, 2003 and on the NCDEX in December, 2003. There are two views on forward trading. Having regard to the view of the Standing Committee, the forward markets regulator has suspended trading in tur, urad, wheat and rice. Government has referred the matter to an expert committee and will take appropriate action on receipt of the report.

Six AIIMS-type institutions: I am informed by the Ministry of Health that while Rs. 75 crore was provided in 2006-07, some unexpected problems have arisen due to the rejection of bids for the selection of project consultant and architectural concept design. They are in the process of re-tendering. Meanwhile, land has been provided and environmental impact assessment study and pre-construction survey of the sites are under way.

De-hoarding operations: I referred to the Prime Minister's letter in the Budget speech. We are informed that five States have imposed limits on

stocks for wheat and pulses and have also taken action against those who held stocks in excess of the limits. I would urge other State Governments to heed the advice of the Prime Minister and impose stock limits and start de-hoarding operations.

Power generation: Mr. Chairman, Sir, I have already given figures of generation capacity added during 2002-07. We can quibble about when the foundation stone was laid and when power generation started; but the fact remains that in 2004-05,6,100 MW was added and in 2005-06,6,300 MW was added. This is more than what was added in any year between t998-99 and 2003-04. However, I readily concede that we have to take a more aggressive and focussed approach to the question of adding to capacity, especially in view of the rising demand for electricity.

National Agricultural Insurance Scheme (NAIS): As Members are aware, NAIS was introduced in 1.999-2000. It applies to both Kharif and Rabi food crops and, from the very beginning, the claims have far exceeded the premium. For example, in Kharif 2005, while the premium was Rs. 450 crore, the claims reported were in the order of Rs. 1,060 crore. For Rabi 2005-06, the premium was Rs. 105 crore and the claims payable were Rs. 338 crore. Since the start of the scheme, Government has grappled with this problem. A restructured scheme is under examination, Meanwhile, I'have proposed that we may ask Agricultural Insurance Corporation to start a weather-based crop insurance scheme in two or three States as an alternative to the NAIS

National Highway Development Programme: In the 1,257 days between December 12, 2000 and May 21,2004, the length of highways completed was 2,342 kms. Besides, during this period, 122 contracts for 5,053 kms at an estimated value of Rs. 23,126 crore were awarded. Contrast this with the record during the 1,013 days between the period May 22, 2004 and February 28. 2007. During this period, 3,473 kms of highways have been completed; 174 contracts for 7.369 kms have been awarded; and the estimated cost is Rs. 46,561 crore i reaffirm Government's commitment to NHDP; in fact the. UPA Government has gone beyond the Golden Quardrilateral and the North-South East-West corridors. New phases have been added to NHDR' and this is one of the important programmes of the Government in the infrastructure sector.

Remunerative prices for farmers: The UPA Government has substantially

increased MSP for wheat and paddy. In 1997-98, MSP for wheat was Rs. 510 per quintal for six years, by 2003-04, it had risen to Rs. 630 per quintal. In only three years of the UPA Government, we have increased it to Rs. 640, Rs. 700 (with bonus) and Rs. 750 at the beginning of the sowing season: The Cabinet has taken some decisions concerning wheat and, the Minister of Agriculture had made a statement in that behalf and announced a bonus of Rs. 100 per quital. Similarly, for paddy of common variety, in 2006-07 MSP was fixed at Rs. 580 per quintal with a bonus of Rs. 40 for paddy procured in Kharif 2006-07. The UPA Government has stood solidly by the farmer and has strained every nerve to make farming a viable proposition.

I would take this opportunity to quote a passage from the Economic Survey:

"There could be a potential contradiction between a "remunerative" price for the farmer and a fair price for the consumer in the short run. The same contradiction arises in the case of pricing of petroleum products. The reconciliation of such a contradiction ought not to be in terms of an expensive compromise of fiscal rectitude."

Shri Yashwant Sinha challenged me to recount our achievements in the area of infrastructure. Six core industries are usually classified as "infrastrtteture": In the first five years of the NDA Government, the average growth rate of infrastructure industries was 5.1 per cent. Even if you add the last year, the rate improves to 5.26 per cent. In the three years of the UPA Government, the growth rates have been 5.8 per cent, 6.1 per cent and, so far upto January, 2007, 8.4 per cent. Assuming that the current year ends with 8.4 per cent the average for the three years will be 6.76 per cent.

We have taken a number of initiatives in each of these industries. On coal production, we have dereserved large deposits of coal and made coal available for captive mining, which itself has been defined more liberally. On electricity, we have launched the ultra mega power projects The Rajiv Gandhi Grameen Vidyutikaran Yojana was introduced in April, 2005. On August 23,2006, we notified the Rural Electrification Policy. On petroleum, we have successfully completed NELP-VI. On December 20, 2006, we notified the policy for development of natural gas pipelines and gas distribution networks. The viability gap funding scheme for

agriculture has been announced and 21 proposals have been granted in principle approval. It is because of these policies and new initiatives that the infrastructure sector has witnessed a spurt in growth.

Mr. Chairman Sir, let me now return to the essential features of the Budget. The Budget is, first and foremost, a statement of receipts and expenditure. In 2003-04, gross tax revenue of the Central Government was Rs. 252, 499 crore. In 2004-05, we increased it by 19.9 per cent; in 2005-06, we increased it by 20.0 per cent and in 2006-07, we have increased it by another 27.8 per cent, according to the Revised Estimates. In 2007-08, Budget Estimate (BE) upon BE, we plan to increase the gross tax revenue by another 24 per cent.

The prime beneficiaries of the increase in the Central Government's gross tax revenue are the State Governments. Year after year, we have devolved more money to the State Governments by way of shared tax revenues and by way of grants and loans. In 2004-05, the resources transferred to State Governments and Union Territories (UTs) was Rs. 157,567 crore. In 2005-06, it was Rs. 173,142 crore and in 2005-07, it was Rs. 214,935 crore. And in 2007-08, it wil be Rs. 249,437 crore.

In addition to the above, Honourable Members are aware that there are direct releases of Central assistance to State Plans and implementing agencies as well as direct releases under Central Plan to State and District levels and to the implementing agencies. These sums are also large, and approximately Rs. 50,000 crore every year.

As a result, the combined financial position of the State Government has improved considerably in the last three years. Let me compare the tax revenue available to the States (share in Central taxes and own" tax revenue) with the net tax revenue available to the Centre. In 2006-07, for example, the tax resources available to the Centre was Rs. 345,971 crore and the tax revenue available to the States was Rs. 377,580 crore. For many years now, States have enjoyed an edge over the Centre in terms of availablility of tax revenues. That is why we say that the States must come forward to share an equal responsibility in many of the programmes and schemes that are being implemented in the States. Be it Central Plan schemes or Centrally sponsored schemes or State Plan schemes which are supported by the Central Government, it is important that States share an equal responsibility with the Central Government.

Among the other major initiatives taken by the UPA Government with the full cooperation of the State Governments are the successful introduction of VAT; the beginning of the phase out of CST from April 1, 2007; and the start of work to prepare a road map to introduce GST with effect from April 2,2010. In my view, these constitute the most comprehensive tax reform ever undertaken in this country.

The next major feature of any Budget is allocation of the resources raised among various heads of expenditure. The pattern of allocation of such resources signals the priorities of a Government. Let me look at some major sectors and the allocations made over the years. Let me take rural employment and poverty alleviation. Beginning with Jawahar Rojgar Yojana and culminating in NREGS, broadly speaking, there were eight schemes under this head. Looking at the sector as a whole, in 1997-98, the total allocation was approximately Rs. 5,850 crore. When the NDA Government completed its term of office after one plus five years, the total allocation in 2003-04 was approximately Rs. 9,924 crore (that is an increase of about 70 per cent). After four Budgets of the UPA Government, the allocation for this sector in 2007-08 has risen steadily to approximately Rs. 27,140 crore (that is an increase of 275 per cent over 2003-04).

Likewise, under Accelerated Rural Water Supply Programme, the allocation in 1997-98 was about Rs. 1,300 crore. By 2003-04, it had increased to Rs. 2,585 crore and by 2007-08, the UPA Government has increased it to Rs. 6,500 crore.

The same is the story in education. From about Rs. 1,800 crore in 1997-98, it rose to Rs. 4,560 crore in 2003-04, but in 2007-08, the allocation is Rs. 25,081 crore. The same is true of health.

If you look at Central Plan outlay by sectors, Honourable Members will find that in the three years of the UPA Government, the outlays have increased dramatically. These figures are available in the document titled "Budget at a Glance" for the respective years. I shall quote some examples of outlays for the year 1997-98, the year before the NDA assumed office; for 2003-04, the last year for the NDA Government; and for 2007-08, for which I presented the Budget 16 days ago. For agricultrue and allied activities, the outlay increased from Rs. 2,756 crore to Rs. 3,671 crore during the NDA Government, and under the UPA Government, it now stands at Rs. 8,588 crore. The figures for rural development are Rs. 6,949 crore to

Rs. 13,238 crore and from Rs. 13,238 crore to Rs. 20,342 crore. For the energy sector, the numbers are from Rs. 21,129 crore to Rs. 42,240 crore, and from Rs. 42,240 crore to Rs. 79,158 crore. For social services, the figures are from Rs. 12,115 crore to Rs. 31,102 crore, and from Rs. 31,102 crore to Rs. 80,315 crore.

I could go on and on. In every sector, the UPA Government has, at the end of three years and at the beginning of the fourth year, made much larger allocations than in all the six years of the NDA Government. You can take any sector. You will find that more money has been allocated. It is true that, in some sectors, the allocation is not adequate. Members have demanded more, members are right. Many sectors deserve more. But, Members should kindly appreciate that while we are doing our best to raise more resources, the t6tal envelope of resources has limited elasticity. Given the total resources available, we have done our best.

As I said in the Budget speech, there is no dearth of funds, there is no dearth of schemes, what needs to be done is to deliver the intended outcomes.

I take pride in saying that all this has been possible without departing from fiscal responsibility. We have raised revenue in a responsible manner and we have allocated funds in a responsive manner. In doing so, we have adhered to the obligations under the FRBM Act. I understand that Shri Malhotra is the Prsident of the Archery Federation of India and I would have thought that when he spoke in the Lok Sabha, or Shri Yashwant Sinha, he would have a good word for the Government's fiscal marksmanship if not for anything else. We have done better than the target for fiscal deficit and the target for revenue deficit. This is what makes India's growth story credible and sustainable. This is what encourages both the domestic investor and the foreign investor. This is what gives us the courage to go forward on the path of inclusive growth.

My Budget speech contained a little over 12,800 words. It is a matter of some satifaction that 25 words have made a deep impression upon Shri Sinha and some of his friends. Let me say this: I Jove the sea, I love trees, I love birds and I love animals. I take comfort in the fact that at least one of my predecessors shares my love for animals. The difference between us is that I have frankly admitted my concern for dogs and cats while my predecessor hid his affection in the minute of the Finance Bill. In chapter

23 of the customs tariff occurs entry 2309.10. The rate of duty was 40 per cent. One of my predecessors reduced the duty from 40 per cent to 35 per cent. Two years later, he again reduced it from 35 per cent to 30 per cent. Shri Sinha and some of his colleagues in this House, especially Smt. Sushma Swaraj—may be wondering who I am referring to. Of course, the Finance Minister who did this quitely and without fanfare knows that he
-did so, but he did not have the courage to share these facts with his colleagues, especially Smt. Sushma Swaraj. The two years in which customs duty on pet foods was reduced were 2000-01 and 2002-03, and the distinguished Finance Minister who did so was none other than Shri Yashwant Sinha. When I unwittingly and somewhat innocently decided to
introduce a line in my speech to relieve the tedium of listening to taxes and numbers, I had fondly hoped that all of us are blessed with a sense of
humour. Alas, that is not so, The best that I can do now is to wish Shri Sinha not only a long life and a long tenure in the opposition but also a sense of humour?

Allow me to end by saying that strong fundamentals and faster growth has given us an opportunity to unfurl our sails and catch the wind.

With these words, once again I thank the Honourable Members and I request them to kindly approve the Budget

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Now, we shall take up the Appropriation (Vote on Account) Bill, 2007, and the Appropriation Bill, 2007, for consideration. Mr. Minister, you move these Bills.

GOVERNMENT BILLS

The Appropriation (Vote on Account) Bill, 2007

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE (SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM): Sir, I beg to move:

> That the Bill to provide for the withdrawal of certain sums from and out of the Consolidated Fund of India for the services of a part of the financial year 2007-08, as passed by Lok Sabha, be taken into consideration.

The question was put and the motion was adopted.